

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, some computers and electronic systems will have difficulty adjusting to the dates beginning in the year 2000. This is the oft-mentioned "Y2K" bug. This problem is caused by a long-time custom in electronic industries to use 2-digit dates. Thus, 1980 was simply "80", 1990 was "90", and 1998 is "98." However, that system does not work when we get to January 1, 2000. At that time, many machines will think it is January 1, 1900.

There are enormous national interests at stake as we prepare to deal with the technical challenge of the year 2000. Critical national infrastructures may be threatened, including many government services, banking and financial services, energy and power, telecommunications, transportation, and vital human services such as hospitals.

It is not surprising that Federal Government agencies include millions of computer and electronic systems. Led by the gentleman from California (Mr. HORN), the chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform's Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology, the Republican Congress has pushed long and hard to whip Federal agencies into action to address Y2K problems.

Although the Federal Government faces a major Y2K challenge, the private sector challenge from the year 2000 transition is far greater. Recent congressional testimony from the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System estimated costs at roughly \$50 billion, and many estimates go far beyond that staggering figure. And those are U.S. costs alone. Actually, this is an international problem, and we must recognize that.

Mr. Speaker, while I am not an alarmist, I believe it is prudent for Congress to immediately consider legislation to help the private sector deal with Y2K problems. It is clear that two legislative reforms would effectively encourage computer-related companies and the private sector clients that they serve to avoid Y2K problems and reduce the impact on the public by, first, a limited modification of Federal liability law and, second, a targeted anti-trust exemption for firms working together to deal with Y2K problems. These reforms make up H.R. 4240, legislation that I introduced just yesterday called the Y2K Liability and Anti-Trust Reform Act.

The press is already reporting that some unscrupulous lawyers are planning and filing multi-billion-dollar Y2K lawsuits to reap monetary rewards from America's pain. It is clearly in the national interest to have companies focused on fixing Y2K problems rather than being frozen by the fear of lawsuits.

Earlier this week, the Clinton administration proposed a pop-gun response to this potentially immense problem. The President proposed to provide a small degree of liability protection to

encourage companies to share information on how to solve Y2K problems. Mr. Speaker, far more than that is needed.

With just 17 months remaining before January 1, 2000, one of our core principles on Y2K policy must be to focus all relevant talent and energies on avoiding the problems. While the President's proposal falls short, the liability provisions in H.R. 4240 are the best way to achieve that goal.

While talk is nice, the Y2K Liability and Anti-Trust Reform Act provides a real incentive for companies to solve Y2K problems before computer systems fail and the American people suffer.

My legislation requires computer-related companies to take responsibility for products they have developed and sold. They must make fixes available to customers for their non-Y2K compatible hardware and software, and those fixes must be available cost-free for products sold after December 31, 1994. I am confident that freed from the fear of multi-billion-dollar lawsuits that the enormously creative and successful American high-technology industries can respond to this challenge.

Companies that use computer and electronic systems must also take responsibility for fixing Y2K problems before things go wrong. Remember, Mr. Speaker, it is the American people that lose when a company adopts a strategy based on the plan to simply sue someone when things go wrong.

Companies that use computer and electronic systems gain a similar degree of liability protection if they make all reasonable efforts to fix the Y2K problems in their systems, run a test by July 1, 1999, and notify all customers and the President's Y2K Commission of the prospects for their own Y2K failures by August 1, 1999.

Right now, as the clock ticks towards the year 2000, too much private-sector energy is being wasted on legal liability strategies rather than finding and fixing potential failures. The liability provisions in H.R. 4240 will create a real incentive for companies to focus on finding and fixing problems, because there will be a tangible reward, some freedom from aggressive Y2K lawsuits.

MEXICO POLLUTES BEACHES OF IMPERIAL BEACH, CALIFORNIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. BILBRAY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BILBRAY. Mr. Speaker, this weekend, the City of Imperial Beach, the most southwest lake community in the continental United States, is going to celebrate its 17th annual sand castle competition.

Now, we hear many Members of the House come here and talk about great things in their communities. But, sadly, this is not going to be a great event unless things change over night. Sadly, we are going to be confronted by the fact that Mexico is sending down 25

million gallons of untreated raw sewage that may close the beaches of Imperial Beach for this great weekend for this community.

Now, instead of being greeted by sand castles and happy children and families and blue sky and warm water and beautiful surf, the visitors of Imperial Beach may have to confront red pollution signs, not because they did not clean up their environment, not because they did not spend the money for infrastructure to make sure that they did not pollute, but because the United States allows a foreign government to violate American sovereignty and pollute American soil.

Sadly, for the last 20 years, Mr. Speaker, we have stood by and watched a foreign country pollute our wildlife preserves and our beaches in southern California. And we have talked and we have negotiated. We have spent hundreds of millions of dollars of American taxpayers' funds at trying to address this issue while negotiating with the Republic of Mexico.

Now, this problem is something that most people do not understand. The Tijuana River flows through a major metropolitan area of over a million people and flows north into San Diego. And San Diego has been impacted by this.

Now, the responsibility for cleaning up this mess, Mr. Speaker, is not a local, not a State, it is a Federal obligation, because it is crossing an international border. And if the people of Mexico do not care about what they are doing to their neighbors, and we all talk about being good neighbors, I think we can all understand, in a civilized society, being a good neighbor does not mean dumping your raw sewage into somebody else's neighborhood.

I am asking the Congress and the President and the Senate and all of America to finally stand up and say, we are willing to confront our friends and our neighbors to the south about the environmental problems that are not just HIDTA and NAFTA but predate NAFTA, but it is time to do what good neighbors should do every once in a while, tell our neighbors to clean up their act, quit polluting our waters, quit destroying our sand castle competitions, quit endangering our children and our families.

Mr. Speaker, it is time that Congress makes some firm, tough decisions about what we are willing to do to send that message across. I would ask us to consider that if Mexico is not sensitive to the fact that tourism has been destroyed in the City of Imperial Beach again and again over the last 20 years, we should consider a sensitivity lesson to the Republic of Mexico and consider if tourism going into Mexico from the United States is a guaranteed right that we want to continue as long as this pollution continues.

I am not proposing any actions today, Mr. Speaker, but I am asking us to become aware that it is time that

this Congress, who talks about the environment, who gets involved in environmental issues all over this Nation, indeed the world, now be willing to stand up for the environment in our own soil that is crossing the border and start backing up our well-intentioned rhetoric with real action that will make sure that 18th sand castle competition in Imperial Beach is one that is clean, sunny and happy for both sides of the border.

□ 1430

INTRODUCTION OF THE FARM LIFE EXTENSION ACT OF 1998

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, today, earlier today, along with the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) and the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS) I introduced legislation called the Flex Act, the Farm Life Extension Act of 1998.

Many people across this country are becoming more and more aware of the very serious problem that we have in agriculture today. For those who do not live in farm States, I would urge them to take a look at some recent newspaper stories, like the one on the Sunday New York Times front page which talks about the need for assistance for South Dakota and other agricultural producers across this country. And, if one looks and drives across any of those States today, you will see a lot of for sale signs, you will see a lot of auctions, because there are a lot of people who are going out of business, and in fact, if you will listen very closely, you will hear a lot of tales about the slow death, the last gasping breath, of agriculture as prices continue to plummet and producers are asked more and more to realize their incomes from the marketplace. And when asking them to do that with the 1996 farm bill, the Freedom to Farm Act, we indicated to them that we would be more aggressive in seeking export markets and opportunities for their agricultural commodities, and in fact we have not followed through on that end of the deal, and today I want to call on the administration to further use the tools that have been provided, the Export Enhancement Program that has been authorized and funded by the Congress to help our agricultural producers compete on a level playing field with those other producers around the world.

And, in fact, the American farmer can compete with anyone, but the American farmer cannot compete on a level playing field with taxpayers in places like Germany and France and other countries around the world that subsidize their farm economies. We have to be more aggressive in terms of seeking market opportunities for our agricultural producers. That is a long

term issue, and if we are going to see prices stabilize in the long run and to increase the prices that our producers derive they marketplace, we have to realize that 96 percent of the world's population in fact lives outside the United States, and that is where the future markets for agriculture are.

At the same time we have a more immediate problem in agriculture today. We have a cash flow problem. Because prices are so low, we have farmers who are in a world of hurt across this country. It is probably more pronounced in my part of the world, up in the northern plain States, but it is starting to creep out into the other States across this country, and I think one of the things that we are finding is that, if the agricultural sector of our economy is weak, our country is weak, and we have to have a healthy agricultural economy in order to have a strong America.

And so today, in introducing this legislation, we have sought to bring some badly needed capital, some cash flow assistance, to farmers across this country. Very simply what it does is takes the existing payments that they would already receive under the Freedom to Farm Act and allow them to take them in one lump sum today, and in so doing it gives them additional flexibility, allows them to make a management and a business decision about whether or not to accelerate and receive those payments today, perhaps pay down debt, perhaps even get out of the business, if that is their choice, but at least allows them to better manage the resources that we have provided under the farm policy in this country for the next 5 years. And our bill is a way of doing that.

In fact, we have come up with a mechanism whereby that can be financed. If, in fact, you put the 5-year payments, bring them back to net present value today and allow the farmers to accept that, you have an appropriation problem up front, you do not effect budget authority. But to address that what we have done is borrowed on a concept that was used in the State of South Dakota with the conservation reserve program, and that is to allow Farmer Mac in this case to bond and to take the proceeds from those bonds to purchase the contracts and then, as those contracts come due, purchase the contracts from the farmers, get the cash out there, and then as those contracts come due, USDA would reimburse Farmer Mac and thereby eliminate the immediate need for up-front assistance for appropriations.

And that is basically the way that this bill works and the concept that is embodied in it, and it is something again that I hope we can use and implement that will bring additional cash flow relief to a lot of agricultural producers in this country.

And just earlier today we announced, along with the Speaker and the chairman of the agricultural committee, Mr. BOB SMITH, a short-term assistance

which would advance the payment that they will receive, the '99 Freedom to Farm payment, to October 1 this year, \$5.5 billion going out to agricultural producers this year rather than next, giving them again the immediate cash flow assistance that they need to make those payments that are due at the bank and other places.

And I appreciate very much the leadership of our committee and the leadership of this House have taken to address this serious problem in rural America, and so I credit the leadership and look forward to working with them to enact not only that bill, but the Flex Act of 1998.

APPOINTMENT OF CONFEREES ON H.R. 1853, CARL D. PERKINS VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL EDUCATION ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1997

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). Without objection the Chair appoints the following conferees on H.R. 1853, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act Amendments of 1997:

For consideration of the House bill and the Senate amendment and modifications committed to conference:

Messrs. GOODLING,
MCKEON,
RIGGS,
PETERSON of Pennsylvania,
SAM JOHNSON of Texas,
CLAY,
MARTINEZ,
and KILDEE.

There was no objection.

SHARE THE PROSPERITY BY INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, the House is galloping toward recess and adjournment. The Republicans have had a very clever strategy this year. We have spent a lot of time in recess and very little time in deliberations. That is not by accident, it is a way to guarantee that important things are done rapidly, that there is a minimum of deliberation, that the party and the minority does not have an opportunity to bring issues to the public. It has worked very well. You know, we have had a lot of very extreme things accomplished in a few days using this technique of minimizing deliberations and maximizing action while we are here.

So, I suspect the process of galloping is going to continue between now and the time we go out on the August recess, and, once we return from the August recess, of course the galloping is even going to even move faster.

The Republican schedule is part of the whole strategy, and what it does is it turns our democracy into a form of distorted law making, which is not